

## Aristotle on the Cognition of Value

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In my paper, I defend an interpretation according to which Aristotle thinks in *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) that the rational aspect of soul is needed in discerning which ends of desire would be good. Many interpreters have traditionally supported this, ‘rationalist’ line of interpreting Aristotle’s theory of value cognition. The rationalist interpretation has, however, recently come under a novel challenge from Jessica Moss (2011, 2012), but has not yet received a defence. Moss attempts to resurrect now virtually abandoned ‘anti-rationalist’ interpretation, which claims, in a contrast to the rationalist one, that discerning good ends may require no activity from the rational aspect, but only non well-habituated non-rational desire. Moss’ interpretation appeals to certain Aristotle’s claims in *De Anima* (*DA*) 3, which, she thinks, show that non-rational *phantasia* suffices for discerning good ends if only accompanied with the habituated desire. Although I admit that her interpretation can successfully avoid some problems that earlier anti-rationalist interpretations faced with certain passages of *EN*, I also argue, however that it introduces some new problems, and (probably inadvertently) attributes philosophically incoherent views about moral responsibility to Aristotle. Therefore I conclude that even after Moss’ improvements to the anti-rationalist interpretation, the rationalist interoperation remains overall more plausible.

### Introduction

In my paper, I defend an interpretation of Aristotle, according to which the rational aspect of soul is needed in discerning which potential ends of desire would be good.<sup>1</sup> I argue that since not every potential end that we can desire is good, we have to discern good ends, and rational discernment (*krisis*) is required for this task. Without rational discernment, ability to focus on certain perceptions, we could not distinguish truly good ends from possibly pleasant, but ultimately bad ends. Since antiquity, authoritative commentators of Aristotle, including Aspasius, have supported this, rationalist line of interpreting his theory of value cognition, and it enjoys wide support

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<sup>1</sup> I use the rational aspect of soul as an umbrella term for Aristotle’s concepts of *to dianoetikon*, *to logikon* and their variations such as *to logou echon* and *to noetikon*.

even today.<sup>2</sup> The rationalist interpretation has, however, recently faced a novel challenge from Jessica Moss, against which it does not have yet received a defence.<sup>3</sup> She attempts to renew a now disregarded anti-rationalist interpretation, which emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but was subsequently disregarded and which claims, in contrast to the rationalist interpretation, that even discerning good ends may not involve the rational aspect of soul, but only the habituation of the opposite, non-rational aspect to take pleasure from realising such ends.<sup>4</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-rationalist interpreters, whose arguments I will review in the first part of my paper, argued for the non-rationality of value cognition by appealing in particular to *EN* 2.4, in which Aristotle says that moral virtue does not require knowledge, and to *EN* 3.3, which claims that we do not deliberate about the ends of our desires, but only about the means to them. Certain passages in *EN* 6 and 7, in which Aristotle assigns the task for providing us with good ends to moral virtue, may seem to reinforce these claims. The main reason for the scant following of this traditional anti-rationalist interpretation among later interpreters is, however, that in *EN* 1.13 Aristotle divides the human soul into rational and non-rational aspects, and claims that the non-rational aspect—in particular, its ‘desiring element’<sup>5</sup>—must ‘obey’ (*peitharchei*) reason so as to desire good ends.<sup>6</sup> In *EN* 6.13, the philosopher adds that a person can be ‘good in the strict sense (*agathos haplos*)’<sup>7</sup> if and only if he has the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*, which, as he states in *EN* 6.9, has access to the ‘the true conception’ of end.<sup>8</sup> These Aristotle’s statements, which seem to signal that moral virtue involves reason, and that the rational aspect *must* play a part in value

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<sup>2</sup> The earliest known rationalist interpreter of Aristotle is a 2<sup>nd</sup>-century commentator Aspasius (see fn. 12 below), who is also the earliest known commentator of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. A recent version of the rationalist interpretation can be found e.g. in Irwin 2007, pp. 158–97.

<sup>3</sup> I discuss Moss 2011 and 2012 in this paper. She has since revised her interpretation (2014a), but the main objection that I present in this paper applies even to this revised version (see fn. 91 below).

<sup>4</sup> This interpretation probably comes from Walter 1874, and was later expanded in Zeller 1894.

<sup>5</sup> *EN* 1.13 1102b30 (R). Translated by Ross 1995. In the subsequent footnotes, Ross is abbreviated as (R) and another translation of *EN* that I use, Bartlett and Collins 2009, as (B&C). If the translation is my own, there is no abbreviation. Whether I quote from (R) or (B&C) or use my own translation is determined by the accuracy and readability of either translation.

<sup>6</sup> *EN* 1.13 1102b26.

<sup>7</sup> *EN* 6.13 1144b30 (R).

<sup>8</sup> *EN* 1142b33. For more discussion about Aristotle’s statement, see fn. 22 below.

cognition, have rendered the traditional anti-rationalist readings of *EN* 2.4, 3.3 and the selected passages of *EN* 6 and 7 to seem incoherent to many interpreters.

Moss has, however, challenged the widely endorsed assumption that returning the ancient rationalist line of interpretation is the most plausible alternative to the incoherent anti-rationalist interpretations of Aristotle's theory of value cognition. Instead, she has suggested a novel version of the anti-rationalist interpretation, by arguing, on the basis of certain passages of *DA* 3, that insofar as representing the ends for desire is the task of *phantasia*, or, imagination—and since *phantasia* cognises those ends non-rationally, by imagining (*phantazein*) them as pleasant on the basis of one's past pleasurable experiences about reaching certain ends—the discernment of good ends does not presuppose reason.<sup>9</sup> Habituation to realise good ends, so that one comes to enjoy from only imagining realising such ends, suffices for discerning which ends of desire are good. In value cognition, the task of the rational aspect of soul might only be to conceptualise pleasurable mental images (*phantasmata*) of ends: to label them as 'good' so as to enable us to use them in moral deliberation.

I will study Moss' challenge in the second part of the paper, concentrating on her interpretation about *phantasia* as exclusively non-rational ability to cognise good ends, and on how that interpretation relates to the received interpretation of *phantasia*, according to which it is a capacity that entirely belongs neither to the rational nor to the non-rational aspect of the soul. In the third part, I will attempt to show a way for the rationalist line of interpretation to address her arguments. I believe Moss overlooks some serious problems to which her interpretation is susceptible, but which the rationalist interpretation can avoid, while, however, also providing us with a tried and tested account of Aristotle's theory of value cognition.

### 1.1 Rationalist Interpretation

Aristotle states that our desires are aimed at two types of ends: '[s]ome (ends) are activities (*energeiai*) others products apart from the activities that produce them'.<sup>10</sup> Only the former types can be said to be good without introducing any further

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<sup>9</sup> See section 1.2 below for references to Moss 2011 and 2012.

<sup>10</sup> *EN* 1.1 1094a3–4 (R).

qualifications, because ‘where there are ends apart from actions (*praxeis*), it is the nature of the product to be better than the activities.’<sup>11</sup> For the activities undertaken only in order to gain a certain product (e.g. a flute, pleasure, money or honour) can be good only insofar as they help in bringing about that product, whereas only an activity, or, action (*praxis*) undertaken (also) for its own sake can be good as such. Since Aristotle also thinks that people do not need to use reason to pursue pleasure, at least—for non-rational animals can have this pursuit, too<sup>12</sup>—we do not need to ask if discerning the latter types of ends must involve the rational part of soul. However, the question becomes pertinent with the former types, as Aristotle nowhere explicitly states if it is needed in discerning an end as unqualifiedly good (*agathos haplos*).

According to the rationalist interpretation, the philosopher’s position is, however, that discerning ends as unqualifiedly good—henceforth simply ‘good ends’—must require reason. This interpretation has ancient origins: for example, the earliest known commentator to *EN*, Aspasius, endorses it.<sup>13</sup> The interpretation begins from *EN* 1.13, in which Aristotle claims that human soul is divisible into two aspects, rational and non-rational: ‘one aspect of [soul] is non-rational (*alogon*), another has reason (*logos*)’ and ‘reason [...] exhorts [people] towards the best’.<sup>14</sup> If the rational aspect desires on the basis of cognising value—discerning what is the best—then the non-rational aspect may not, and this can constitute the difference between the two aspects. The non-rational aspect is further divisible into purely vegetative pursuits and the desire that can be affected by the value cognition of the rational aspect.<sup>15</sup> The desire that can be so affected (*epithumia*)—which I will simply call ‘non-rational

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 4-5 (R).

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. *EN* 1.4 1095b13–20.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Aspasius, *Comm.* 40:5-15 (*ad EN* 2.2 1103b31-1104b3) for an explicit endorsement: even with virtuous people, it is the task of reason to say ‘that this must be done and that this must not be done’ and to justify why (alluding to Aristotle’s distinction between *to hoti* and *dioti* in *EN* 1.4). Aspasius comments to *EN* 1.13 (36:1-5) that in virtuous people, “the desiring and emotive part is said *to partake* in reason in that it ‘is heeding of it’ (*cit. EN* 1.13 1102b31), just as we also say that we take a certain account of our father.” According to Aspasius’ interpretation, we thus seem to require input of the rational part to discern good actions, to justify them, and even to be motivated to perform them.

<sup>14</sup> *EN* 1.13 1102a27–b18.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle writes in *EN* 1.13 1102a31–1102b12 that we have non-rational vegetative desires of nutrition and growth that ‘are mostly displayed in sleep’ (i.e. that cannot be affected by value cognition) and do not differ between good and bad people. Therefore Aristotle concludes that we should ‘let them be’ while discussing virtue. Aristotle distinguishes them the desires that are non-rational, but which can be affected by reason (*logos*) in 1102b13-14.

desire' from now on—has to characteristically do 'with what is pleasant or painful', as Aristotle specifies in *EN* 3.2, 'unlike choice of good action (*prohairesis*)' that results from the desire of the rational aspect (*boulesis*).<sup>16</sup> As the cognition of value is thus not about pleasure, and non-rational desire is concerned especially with pleasure, it seems that good ends cannot be discerned without the activity of the rational aspect. Aristotle adds to this, in *EN* 1.13, that although the desire of the non-rational aspect can be guided by the rational aspect, it nevertheless tends to 'strain against' the dictates of the rational aspect.<sup>17</sup> Hence he must also hold that we can desire an end that we discern as good with our rational abilities independently of whether we anticipate that pursuing will be pleasant or not.

If this interpretation is right, Aristotle's division of human desires on the basis of their ends—excluding those desires that are only for the products of actions and the vegetative desires that bear no relation to value cognition—turns out to be as follows:

Rational desire (*boulesis*): Desiring to *phi* by discerning the goodness of *phi*-ing;

Non-rational desire (*epithumia*): Desiring to *phi* by anticipating (typically) the pleasure of *phi*-ing (there are probably also some other non-rational ends apart from pleasure, but Aristotle does not openly speak of them in *EN* 1.13, because for him, the desire of sensual pleasure is the principal opponent of rational desire<sup>18</sup>).

Although Aristotle thinks that, provided that *phi*-ing is good, it should also feel pleasant,<sup>19</sup> he also concedes that the two above desires are often directed to different ends. As he argues in *EN* 1.7 and 10.7, the best human end (*to telos*), the completion of which achieving *any* other good end (such as receiving rightful honours, just financial rewards, proper pleasures or constructing good flutes) advances, is the life of acting well in which contemplation has a central role, or, *eudaimonia*.<sup>20</sup> Because the best end towards which reason exhorts us is thus highly abstract, pursuing it may not feel immediately pleasant, unlike the pursuit of some other ends, such as those of

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<sup>16</sup> *EN* 3.2 1111b17.

<sup>17</sup> *EN* 1.13 1102b21.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *EN* 2.9 1109b7-8, in which Aristotle states we are the most inclined to go into excesses with regard to pleasure, and thus we should primarily guard ourselves against inappropriate pleasures.

<sup>19</sup> *EN* 10.5 1175a29 (B&C): '[F]or the pleasure proper to the activity helps increase it: those who engage in an activity with pleasure judge each particular better and are more precise about it. For example, those who delight in practicing geometry become skilled geometers [...] and each of the rest will advance in their respective work because they delight in it'. Aristotle continues by arguing that enjoying good activities also makes those activities more permanent and better overall.

<sup>20</sup> See *EN* 1.7 1098a13-1 and 10.7.

eating or drinking, which may not, however, help in realising *eudaimonia*, provided that they are excessive (or sometimes defective, see Aristotle's famous doctrine of mean in *EN* 2.6). The conflict between the immediate pleasure of excesses and ends that bring us closer to *eudaimonia* is the source of our non-rational desire often straining against the rational one. Habituation to enjoy pursuing ends that advance *eudaimonia* should make acting well feel more and more immediately pleasant, eventually surpassing all excessive pleasures.<sup>21</sup> However, only habituation does not suffice for virtue. In *EN* 6.13, Aristotle concludes that for this, also reason is needed:

Virtue is not only a characteristic that is in accord with right reason (*kata ton orthon logon*), but also the one that involves the right reason (*meta tou orthou logou*). [...] It is clear, then, on the basis of what has been said, that it is neither possible to be properly virtuous (*kyrios agathos*) without practical reason (*phronesis*), nor it is possible to have *phronesis* without the moral virtue.<sup>22</sup>

Because proper virtue (*kyria arête*) is acting that is not only in accordance with, but also involves the right reason (*orthos logos*), acquiring it is not only a matter of habituation to enjoy acting well—for example, abstaining from eating or drinking too much—until one immediately begins to enjoy this way of acting. This would be acting only in accordance with the right reason. Rather, proper virtue is acting well, *because* such acting brings about *eudaimonia*, not only insofar it would bring about pleasure.<sup>23</sup> In order to act from the right reason, one needs, as Aristotle reminds in *EN* 6, to develop the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*, which has cognitive access to this 'true conception of end',<sup>24</sup> and commands us to act on the basis of it.<sup>25</sup> The same

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. *EN* 2.3 1104b3–13 (R): '[...] virtue is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of the pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of the pain that we abstain from good ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as to both delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought, this is the right education'. Similar statements can be found in, e.g., *EN* 3.12 1119b13ff and *EN* 10.9 1179a26–31.

<sup>22</sup> *EN* 6.13 1144b25–32.

<sup>23</sup> See *EN* 2.4 1105a29–b5 and *EN* 4.1 1120a23–4, in which Aristotle says that a virtuous person performs good actions because they are *kala*, or, noble. Since he also thinks that the human good consists in acting well—in *EN* 1.4 1095a19–20—it is generally accepted (and argued more extensively for by, e.g., Achtenberg 2002, pp. 8–9, and Irwin 2007, p. 207) that *to kalon* refers to the human good in this context. Aristotle also identifies the human good with the 'noblest thing' in *EN* 1.8 1099a24.

<sup>24</sup> In *EN* 1142b30–33, Aristotle writes: 'if then, it is characteristic of *phronimoi* to have deliberated well, good deliberation (*euboulia*) will be correctness with regard to the means (*pros*) to the end (*to telos*), of which *phronesis* is the true conception (*hypolepsis*).' The grammar of this passage permits that *phronesis* could be a true conception of either (1) 'the end' or (2) 'the means to the end.' It may seem that option (1) would allow us to make the passage to cohere with Aristotle's specification in *EN* 6.12 that *phronesis* is concerned with good ends, unlike cleverness (*deinotes*), which is only concerned with the means to various ends. The interpretative option (2) might thus seem conflate *phronesis* with *deinotes*. I think, however, that we should not adopt the option (1) to avoid the conflation, because

requirement is visible in the conclusion of *EN* 6.13 that one does not have *phronesis* unless one is properly virtuous—acts *kata ton orthon logon*—and *vice versa*.

The above lessons drawn from *EN* 1.13 and 6.13 seem to imply that one cannot learn to pursue the that are good without qualification by habituation only, or without discerning that those ends are good—which requires *phronesis*. Many recent rationalist interpreters—e.g. John Cooper, Norman Dahl and Terence Irwin<sup>26</sup>—have given their support for this interpretation on the basis of these conclusions. The anti-rationalist interpretation, introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as an alternative to this ancient line, first by Julius Walter and then in an expanded form by Eduard Zeller,<sup>27</sup> has proved to be less enduring; as far as I know, no recent interpreter had endorsed it until Moss. The anti-rationalist interpretation, as presented by these scholars, is centred in *EN* 2.4, 3.3 and some passages in *EN* 6 and 7, which may indeed seem to present Aristotle as thinking that discerning good ends does not have to involve the rational aspect of soul. Let me quote those passages and show how an anti-rationalist reads them, and then how the rationalist interpreters could address these readings.

In *EN* 2.4, Aristotle, after remarking that acting well is not yet proper virtue, because we only *become* virtuous by acting well, lists the additional conditions of being a virtuous person. Someone is virtuous only if he, in addition to acting well:

First, acts knowingly (*proton men ean eidos*), second, if he acts by choosing and by choosing the actions in question for themselves; and third, if he acts while being in a steady and unwavering state. But, when it comes to virtues, knowledge (*eidos*) has no, or little, force, whereas the other two conditions amount to not a small part of but rather the whole affair—the conditions that are in fact met as a result of doing just and temperate things many times.<sup>28</sup>

If acting knowingly is unimportant for moral virtue, as Aristotle seems to say above, and if we become virtuous only through habituation, by coming to enjoy acting

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there are also passages in *EN* 6 that preclude *phronesis* from grasping the end (*EN* 6.12 1144a7-9 and *EN* 6.13 1145a5-7, quoted on p. 9 below). Since in order to select the correct means to the end, *phronesis* has, however, to be nevertheless *aware* of the end, some faculty other than it has to provide it with the correct conception of the end (see Natali 2014, p. 196). The interpretative option (2) allows this, and can be specified to avoid conflating *phronesis* with *deinotes*. If only *phronesis* has cognitive access to the true conception of the end, only it enables one to deliberate well about how to bring about *eudaimonia*. *Deinotes* can be correct deliberation about how to realise ends other than *eudaimonia*.

<sup>25</sup> In *EN* 6.13 1144b28, Aristotle identifies *phronesis* with the right reason (*orthos logos*) and in *EN* 6.10 1143a8–9, the philosopher tells us that *phronesis* issues commands (*epitaktikon estin*).

<sup>26</sup> Cooper 1975, Dahl 1984, Irwin 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Walter 1874, Zeller 1896.

<sup>28</sup> *EN* 2.4 1105a29–b5 (B & C, ‘moderate’ replaced with ‘temperate’).

well, then it may seem that discerning good ends does not require having any conception of end, the acquisition of which—at least the correct one—presupposes reason.

This passage in *EN* 3.3 may seem to reinforce this anti-rationalist interpretation:

We deliberate not about ends but about the things towards (*pros*) ends (*tele*). For a doctor does not deliberate (*boulein*) whether he shall heal, nor an orator whether he shall persuade, nor a statesman whether he shall produce law and order, nor does any one else deliberate about his end. They put in place the end (*themenoi to telos*) and consider how and by what things the end is to be attained.<sup>29</sup>

In above passage, Aristotle claims that just as doctors do not deliberate whether to heal or not, so it could be that we do not deliberate (*boulein*) about whether to pursue some good end or not, but we put our ends in proper places in some other way. The following passages in *EN* 6 and 7 clarify that it is neither *phronesis* nor even *logos*, but moral virtue that correctly discerns which potential ends of desire would be good:

Virtue makes the end correct, *phronesis* the means to the end.<sup>30</sup>

Choice is not right without either *phronesis* or virtue: for the one makes us [to have] the [correct] end, and the other [to have] the [correct] means to it.<sup>31</sup>

It is not that reason (*logos*) teaches about (*didaskalikos*) the starting-points, but either natural or habituated virtue teaches the right belief (*tou orthodoxein*) about the starting-point.<sup>32</sup>

The anti-rationalist interpreters have traditionally taken the above claims of *EN* 3.3, 6 and *EE* to imply together that habituated or natural virtue, instead of the rational aspect of soul, puts in place our ends, and at most we can use our *phronesis* to deliberate how to realise them. As Zeller famously concludes, ‘the natural basis of insight [*phronesis*] is the intellectual acuteness that enables us to find and apply proper means to a given end.’<sup>33</sup> Hence it may seem that we do not need the activity of the rational aspect to discern good ends, but only to calculate how to realise them.

The problem with this interpretation, however, is that we have seen Aristotle to argue in *EN* 6.13 that proper virtue must involve *phronesis* and none of the above passages have to be read as contradicting this rationalist argument. *EN* 2.4 only denies the importance of one’s knowledge being *eidos*, or, form, for moral virtue. Our

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<sup>29</sup> *EN* 3.3 1112b12–16.

<sup>30</sup> *EN* 6.12 1144a7–9.

<sup>31</sup> *EN* 6.13 1145a5–7.

<sup>32</sup> *EN* 7.8 1151a17–19.

<sup>33</sup> Zeller 1894, p. 186.



rational discernment of good ends would not, however, involve *eidos* in any case, because, as Aristotle explains in *EN* 1.6, that (even) things that are good in themselves (e.g. ‘*phronesis*, sight, certain pleasures and honour’) do not seem to have any common *eidos* that could account for their goodness.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, *EN* 3.3 claims only that we do not deliberate (*buolein*) whether to pursue a certain end or not—a view with which many rationalist interpreters agree<sup>35</sup>—for Aristotle’s words, which leave open *what* puts our ends in place, does not preclude the rational aspect of our souls from discerning (*krinein*) good ends. Neither do the passages in *EN* 6, for rational *krisis* may not need to require using *phronesis*, or, be an act of deliberation, on the contrary, Aristotle speaks of it in *DA* as if *krisis* were analogous to visual perception instead.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, with regard to the passage of *EN* 7.8, Aristotle claims in *EN* 6.11 that ‘[what discerns] both the first principles and the last things [in deliberation] is *nous* not *logos*.’<sup>37</sup> Now, if our intuitive reason, *nous*, discerns the ends of deliberation instead of *logos*, the inferential part of our reason,<sup>38</sup> discerning good ends must nevertheless require the activity of the rational aspect of soul.

We can therefore see that the passages that may initially seem to support the anti-rationalist interpreters can be compatible with the rationalist line of interpretation. Since the former interpretation seems, however, unable to accommodate those of Aristotle’s passages, in *EN* 1.13 and 6.13, that clearly seem to imply that discerning the good ends of desires require reason, the rationalist interpretation prevails today.

## 1.2 Moss’ anti-rationalist challenge

In her 2012 book, *Aristotle and the Apparent Good*, and in a paper published in 2011, Jessica Moss has, however, challenged the conclusion that Aristotle must be rationalist on account of his views in *EN* 1.13 and 6.13. She suggests that Aristotle

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<sup>34</sup> *EN* 1.6 1096b16-26. Aristotle uses the concepts of *eidos* and *idea* interchangeably in this passage.

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. Bowditch 2008, pp. 326–336 and Reeve 2013, p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> See *DA* 3.3 427a19–22, the passage is quoted on p. 15 below.

<sup>37</sup> *EN* 6.11 1143a35-1143b1.

<sup>38</sup> For Aristotle, reasons for action are matters of *logos*, e.g. *orthos logos*, just as argumentation and speech. Cf. Moss 2014b, which even proposes that *logos* should be translated as ‘explanatory account.’

might only mean that reason is necessary for the pursuit of good ends—at least concepts, the use and formation of which requires reason, ‘help us determine the contents of our perceptions’—but nevertheless think that moral virtue does not presuppose the use of reason in discerning good ends as such.<sup>39</sup> According to Moss, Aristotle can think that ‘we want our ends, because we find them good,’ but this does not have to mean that they are ‘what we rationally judge good.’<sup>40</sup> So far, the anti-rationalist interpretation, which did not recognise that these two views could be separated, that discerning a good end could be non-rational, while determining *that* the end is good require reason, has simply not looked for evidence in the right places. Moss thinks that evidence for Aristotle’s anti-rationalism is to be found especially in *DA* 3, in which the philosopher discusses *phantasia*, often translated as imagination.

Until now, most interpreters of Aristotle’s theory of moral cognition seem to have regarded *phantasia* as a cognitive capacity that cannot be classified as being entirely either rational or non-rational.<sup>41</sup> According to current mainstream interpretation, one task of *phantasia* is to enable us to imagine the ends of desire, which is necessary for any kind of desiring. For in order to desire anything, we have to be able to imagine what would the realising the end of our desire be like: honourable, pleasant *etc.*<sup>42</sup> Aristotle thus writes in *DMA*: ‘*phantasia* suitably prepares desire; and *phantasia* arises through *nous* or through perception (*aisthesis*).’<sup>43</sup> Now, imagining an end of desire (*phantasma*), call it *x*, the mainstream interpretation takes the philosopher’s statement to tell, requires either only perception (e.g. smelling a pleasant smell, seeing *x* emitting it), and at some other times also *nous* (e.g. discerning *x* as the best end to pursue among many possibilities). The discernment of good ends presupposes the

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<sup>39</sup> Moss 2012, p. 40. Moss does not clarify here what ‘determination’ of the contents of perception involves. As we see on pp. 15-16 below, she must, however, mean *determining our perceptions with certain concepts* – making it conceptually explicit that ‘what I see is a good end (or ‘rose’ as on p. 16).’

<sup>40</sup> Moss 2012, p. 158.

<sup>41</sup> Aristotle may seem to claim so in *DA* 3.9 432a27-b1: ‘we shall find parts [of soul] [...] which cannot be classified as either rational or irrational [...] (such as) the imaginative [...]. However, he also adds (b2) ‘it is very difficult to say with which of the other [parts of soul] it is the same or not the same’, so his claim is not decisive. In the same context, he also says that bipartite division of soul is insufficient to describe the soul, because there are (a24) “in a sense infinity of parts.” Cf. *EN* 1.13 (see section 1.1 above), in which Aristotle seems, however, to agree with the bipartite division.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Caston 1996, p. 42, Lorenz 2009, pp. 119–22 and Polansky 2007 *ad loc.* *DA* 3.9 428b10–429a9, in which Aristotle defines *phantasia* as that which enables motion on the basis of perception.

<sup>43</sup> *DMA* 702a18–19.

rational aspect of soul not only according to the passage of *EN* 6.11, quoted on p. 10 above. Also in *DA* 3.11, Aristotle writes that rational (*logistike*) *phantasia* is necessary for this purpose, precisely for ‘measuring by one standard, for one pursues the superior [of various possible ends],’ and because such a measuring is needed ‘so that [we] are able to pick one [*phantasma*] from many possible *phantasmata*,’<sup>44</sup> While perceptual (*aisthetike*) *phantasia* belongs to all animals capable of moving themselves on the basis of sense perception,<sup>45</sup> the rational *phantasia* belongs exclusively to humans, for only their souls have rational aspect. Since human *phantasia* can thus involve either only sense perception or also the activity of the rational aspect of their souls, it cannot be exclusively classified, according to the mainstream interpretation, as entirely either non-rational or rational faculty.

Moss thinks, however, that there is an alternative to this interpretation. She points out that Aristotle states, for example, in *EN* 3.4, ‘without qualification and in truth the object of [rational desire] is the good, but for each person it is the apparent good.’<sup>46</sup> As Aristotle seems to contrast here the object of rational desire with the apparent good, the apparent good (*to phainomenon agathon*) must refer the object of our perceptual, non-rational *phantasia*. Hence his statement may imply that everyone desires what she non-rationally perceives as good.<sup>47</sup> In *EE* 7.2, Aristotle, Moss points out, elaborates his view and explains *how* we can non-rationally perceive good ends:

The object of desire is either the good or the apparent good. And this is why the pleasant is an object of desire, for it is an apparent good, for some believe it is [good] and for some it appears [good] although they do not believe so. For *phantasia* and belief are not in the same part of the soul.<sup>48</sup>

Provided that everyone desires what appears to them as good, the first sentence of this passage cannot mean (*pace* the rationalist interpreters) that we can sometimes desire only the true good, regardless of what our *phantasia* represents as good. Rather,

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<sup>44</sup> *DA* 3.11 434a7–10. The passage is also quoted by Lorenz 2009, p. 122, to establish a similar point. His translation is that rational *phantasia* occurs ‘in animals capable of reasoning: for the decision whether to do this or that is already a task for reasoning; and one must measure by a single standard; for one pursues what is superior; hence one has the ability to make one out of many *phantasmata*.’

<sup>45</sup> See for example *DA* 3.10 433b27–30 and 433b31–434a4, *DA* 2.2 413b21–3 cf. *DA* 3.10 428a10ff, in which Aristotle states, however, that ‘ants, bees or grubs’ do not have *phantasia*.

<sup>46</sup> *EN* 3.4 1113a23–4, also *MA* 700b23–9. Quoted by Moss 2012 on p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Moss 2012, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *EE* 7.2 1235b26–29. Quoted by Moss 2012, on p. xi, 6, 8, 30, 36 fn. 2 and 48. Since this passage is from *EE*, and there seems to be no corresponding views presented in *EN*, one may reasonably doubt, however, whether the passage presents Aristotle’s final view about the issue.

it must only mean, as Moss argues, that apparent good—the end of our non-rational desire—either or not corresponds with what we rationally discern to be a good end.<sup>49</sup> The second sentence of the passage adds pleasure is the end of our non-rational desire. Therefore pleasure *is* the apparent good.<sup>50</sup> If something is not pleasant for us, it cannot appear as good for us, although we do not of course believe that everything that may appear as pleasant for us is good.<sup>51</sup> Aristotle concludes the passage by stating that this disparity between belief and *phantasia* about the good is due to *phantasia* and belief residing not in the same part of human soul. Although Aristotle discusses also rational *phantasia* in *DA* 3.10, this discussion—since we have seen that all desire is based on perceptual *phantasia*—suggests Moss, can be only a description for certain ‘use which rational creatures can put the products of perceptual *phantasia*’, that is, referring to non-rational appearances in deliberation.<sup>52</sup>

*Phantasia* may seem, however, not only separate from the rational aspect of soul, but also opposed to it, just like the non-rational aspect is.<sup>53</sup> For example, according to *DA* 3.10 ‘[m]any men their *phantasia* contrary to their knowledge, and in all other animals there is no thinking (*nous*) or calculation but only (*alla*) *phantasia*’.<sup>54</sup> On Moss’ view, instead of being outside the division of the aspects of soul, as we have seen the mainstream interpretation to claim, this passage shows that *phantasia* and reason are ‘mutually exclusive’.<sup>55</sup> She also concludes that *phantasia* must be within the non-rational aspect of soul.<sup>56</sup> Moss’ conclusion might seem right in the light of the

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<sup>49</sup> Moss 2012, p. ix. Cf. *DA* 3.10 433a27: ‘the object [of our non-rational desire] may be either the real or apparent good.’ Since non-rational desire is incapable of desiring the real good (*eudaimonia*) as such, this passage may be taken to signal, in favour of Moss, that Aristotle wants to establish only correspondence, that the real good can correspond with what appears good for our non-rational desire.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30 and 36 fn. 2.

<sup>51</sup> See Moss 2012, pp. 106-112, in which Moss discusses illusionary *phantasmata*.

<sup>52</sup> Moss 2012, p. 146.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *EN* 1.13 1102b21.

<sup>54</sup> *DA* 3.10 433a10-12. As quoted by Moss 2012 on p. 16 and 138.

<sup>55</sup> According to Moss 2012, p. 138, *DA* 3.10 433a10-12 shows that ‘*phantasia* and intellect’ are ‘mutually exclusive’. On p. 16, Moss argues the quoted passage (together with *DA* 3.10 433a9 and b11) to show in addition that ‘desire moves [one to act] with the aid either of intellect or *phantasia*’ and ‘*phantasia* plays role roughly parallel to that of intellect’ in motivating action.

<sup>56</sup> See Moss 2012, pp. 64-6. For a more condensed and explicit account, see Moss 2011, p. 252. Although *DA* 3.10 433a10-12, as interpreted by Moss 2012 (see fn. 54 above), could have justified this claim, Moss 2011 does not cite it. Instead, she claims (p. 252, in fn.) that ‘for an outright equation of the ethical works’ non-rational passionate part with the perceptive and phantastic part of the

previous quotation: if *phantasia* were outside Aristotle's division of soul, then the philosopher would not have presumably described *phantasia* as if it were opposed to the rational aspect of soul, able to stimulate people to act against their knowledge. Provided that we thus take *phantasia* to belong to non-rational aspect of soul, as Moss advises, and since *phantasia* represents the ends of desires, then the ends of even our rational desires, good ends, would be perceived by the non-rational aspect of our soul, not by a faculty that is outside Aristotle's bipartite division of soul.<sup>57</sup>

The apparently anti-rationalist passage of *EN* 3.3, claiming that we do not deliberate about our ends, and the passages of *EN* 6 and 7.8 that also preclude *phronesis* from setting them, support this conclusion. The conclusion would permit that good actions do not need to be performed in the knowledge (*eidos*) of their end, as Aristotle states in *EN* 2.4, for that end would now be a non-rational representation. Moss attempts, however, to show that apart from these passages traditionally cited by anti-rationalists, her interpretation, *unlike* the previous anti-rationalist interpretations, enables us to read *also* *EN* 1.13 and 6.13 anti-rationalistically, thus making the anti-rationalist interpretation an overall plausible alternative to the rationalist one.

Before we can proceed to assessing Moss' alternative readings of those passages, we need to clarify, however, what she thinks moral discernment (*krisis*) is. Moss argues that we perceive good ends through pleasant sensations—we do not discern them—but we cannot simply perceive which potential pleasure-inducing *phantasma* is 'the superior [of various pursuable ends], because that task requires picking out one perception from many, discerning it. In received interpretative use, choosing the end that one should pursue means bringing particular discernments under the general concept of good—building practical syllogisms such as in *EN* 7.3: 'dry foods are good for men'; 'I am a man'; 'this food is dry'; therefore 'this food is good for me'. Moss proposes, however, that although we of course *can* build syllogisms to discern good

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psychological works see *EE* 2.1 1219b23.' However, unlike *DA* 3.10 433a9-12, this passage does not clearly equate the non-rational part and *phantasia*: 'for in sleep the vegetative part is more active, while the perceptive and appetitive are incomplete.' For Aristotle does not say that 'the perceptive' and 'appetitive' are the same part, but speaks of them in plural, thus possibly denoting different parts.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *DA* 3.11 434a8-10 quoted on p. 12 above. The passage does not, however, have to contradict Moss' claim, because in it Aristotle does not exactly argue that 'discerning one from many *phantasmata*' could not be entirely motivated by non-rational *phantasia*, e.g. by receiving a supremely intense pleasure from focusing on just one particular *phantasma* among various *phantasmata*.

ends on the basis of our value perceptions, we do not have to do so,<sup>58</sup> because non-rational *phantasia*, if it were only properly habituated, could receive perceptions in a way that already entails discerning of their value in relation to one another.<sup>59</sup>

In the beginning of her 2012 book—before presenting her above proposal about the power of habituation to enhance the perception (*aisthesis*) of good ends into the discernment (*krisis*) of the most valuable available end—Moss focuses on Aristotle's statement in *DA* 3.3 that 'thinking (*noein*) and understanding (*phronein*) seem to be just like having a perception (*aesthesis*) of something, for in both cases the soul discerns (*krinein*) and recognizes something of the things that are'.<sup>60</sup> Moss takes this brief statement to announce that, since even perceptions, which do not presuppose reason, because even non-rational animals have them, can be discernments (*krisis*), discernments can be non-rational. 'There is', states Moss, 'nothing specially rational or intellectual about [*krisis*]: even a simple animal who lacks any mental powers more sophisticated than sense of touch counts as [discerner]'.<sup>61</sup> Or, as Moss put the same point in her 2011 article, since focusing on certain perceptions such as sensations of touch 'is 'available to animals as well as to people,' making even discernments must also be available 'to the non-rational part of human soul'.<sup>62</sup> Aristotle may seem to validate Moss' views in *DMA*, in which he briefly remarks 'both *phantasia* and perception (*aesthesis*) hold the same place as *nous*, for all are *kritika*'.<sup>63</sup> Non-rational animals cannot of course learn concepts, which limits their discernments to the sources of certain sensations; but once we have learned a concept, for example, 'rose', Moss assumes, we can discern objects that cause certain familiar sensual perceptions for us (i.e. have certain shape, smell and colour) also *as* roses without each time conceptually determining that each such object is a rose.<sup>64</sup>

If we can discern, for example, roses on the basis of our memorized perceptions, without having the relevant concept always in mind, *phantasia* might equally allow

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<sup>58</sup> For this particular claim, see Moss 2009, pp. 145–6.

<sup>59</sup> Moss 2012, p. 21.

<sup>60</sup> *DA* 3.3 427a19–22. As quoted by Moss 2012 on p. 3. Cf. 432a16 and *DMA* 700b17–20.

<sup>61</sup> Moss 2012, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> Moss 2011, p. 252.

<sup>63</sup> *DMA* 700b20–21. As quoted by Moss 2012 on p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> Moss 2012, p. 40.

discerning an end that cause certain familiar perceptions as good without necessarily attending to the concept of good, and hence without ‘thinking or understanding,’ i.e. the activity of the rational aspect of soul, being required for the task. Moss points out that, in the already quoted passage of *DA* 3.11, Aristotle states that humans are ‘able to pick one [*phantasma*] from many possible *phantasmata*.’ According to her, this implies that *phantasia* enables us to ‘synthesise a single image which represents one option as overall best’ from the various perceptions that we have memorised.<sup>65</sup>

Even if we could discern what is the ‘overall best’ with *phantasia*, considering value discernment as analogous to discerning roses, or any animal discernment, and therefore non-rational, would need, however, a further justification. While many animals can discern the sources of sensuous pleasure, and virtually every person with a healthy sense of sight and memory can discern roses, this is not the case with good ends. Discerning those ends, Aristotle says in *EN* 2.8, is ‘not for everyone nor it is easy.’<sup>66</sup> According to *EN* 3.4, ‘a (morally) virtuous person discerns each thing (i.e. good end) rightly, and in each case the truth appears to (*phainetai*) him.’ Apparently, *only* a virtuous person discerns them rightly, ‘for distinctive things’, the philosopher continues, ‘are noble (*kala*) and pleasant according to (*kata*) each disposition.’<sup>67</sup>

Aristotle’s above conclusions may encourage a rationalist interpreter to argue that learning to discern good ends is ‘not for everyone’, because it must require some intellectual education, even if many other kinds of discernments would not. Moss can justify, however, her interpretation against such an argument. If the accuracy of discerning an end as good depends upon the sensations of pleasure that imagining (*phantazein*) it gives to a virtuous person, then most people could not reliably discern good ends on their own even if they had learned what is good for humans. Non-virtuous people’s *phantasia*, as *DA* 3.10 tells us, is prone to mistakes, probably, because they only have not been habituated to enjoy performing the actions that contribute to the human good. ‘*The road* [to unqualifiedly good ends]’, writes

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 148 Moss does not unfortunately explain how this process takes place.

<sup>66</sup> *EN* 2.8 1109a28-9.

<sup>67</sup> *EN* 3.4 1113a29–32. Moss (2011) presents her interpretation of the passage on p. 25: ‘If the virtuous person’s ability to perceive facts about value [moral cognition] is a matter of being pleased and pained in the right ways, or admiring and being disgusted by the right things [as the passage says], then this perception [moral cognition] is an operation of non-rational cognition’. Her 2012 book lists several additional passages in favour of this conclusion (pp.160-1), but this passage is her main support.

Aristotle in *EE* 7.2, is ‘*through pleasure*: it is necessary for fine (*kala*) things to be pleasant.’<sup>68</sup> In *EN*, he confirms this, argues Moss, for example, by writing that ‘*the whole affair* both in virtue and in the political art is about pleasures (*hedone*) and pains.’<sup>69</sup> In these passages, Aristotle, according to Moss, does not claim as if coming to enjoy acting well would only *help* one in achieving moral virtue together with intellectual education—as a rationalist interpreter might like to say—but rather as if *it would suffice* for the task.<sup>70</sup> Habituation gets us to associate acting well with experiences of pleasure, the memorising of which allows us imagine the pleasure ensuing from a certain virtuous action, having a pleasurable *phantasma* about a good end. And having such a *phantasma*, we have seen Moss to argue, is discerning the end as good. The rational aspect of soul has no role to play in value cognition.

Moss’ interpretation of Aristotle’s theory of value cognition thus implies that one can become able to discern which ends are good through only being habituated to enjoy acting well. If imagining a certain action produces pleasure to a well-habituated, i.e., virtuous, person, then that action must be a good end. Since her interpretation, thinks Moss, holds true with any good action, we can now attempt test it with the kind of action that one could think as the most obvious counterexample to it: a heroically courageous action. According to Moss’ conception, even a heroic warrior, thanks to his habituated character, can discern that fighting until death in a battle is a good end only by having sensations of pleasure while imagining such a heroic death. Since acting well can often be physically painful—extremely so in this case—the pleasure that a virtuous warrior derives from imagining it relies on the synthesising ability of his *phantasia* to pick one possible course of action as the ‘best’ among the perceptions that he has memorised. Even if also non-virtuous warrior could somehow imagine that a heroic death may, for example, contribute to the future *eudaimonia* of her *polis* and is thus the best course of action available *etc.*,<sup>71</sup> this awareness—since he is not habituated to derive sufficient pleasure from acting well, and thus from imagining

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<sup>68</sup> *EE* 7.2 1237a6-7, as quoted by Moss 2012 on p. 202.

<sup>69</sup> *EN* 2.3 115a10-12, as quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* However, the passages do not have to be read as making such a claim. They can also be read as only rhetorically stressing (for they employ rhetorical language) that learning to derive pleasure from acting well is essential for becoming virtuous, without excluding the need for rational development.

<sup>71</sup> Kraut 1990, p. 122, thinks this is Aristotle’s justification for the virtuousness of a heroic death.



herself engaged in such acting in difficult situations neither—would not suffice to drive her to prefer heroic death over running away.

Despite Moss' interpretation seems to be able to provide a conceivable account of even heroically courageous acting, it might, however, still be difficult to conceive *how* perceiving an end as pleasant could be the same as discerning a good end—or, even, how perceiving a certain shape and colour could be the same as discerning a rose *etc.* One might think there is a 'naturalistic fallacy' in any such an equation.<sup>72</sup> However, even if Aristotle did not consider it important to elucidate this matter any further, it would nevertheless be good news for anti-rationalist interpreters if the philosopher simply thought that good ends could be discerned non-rationally, as Moss reads him in *DA* 3. They could admit, as Moss does, that '[c]ertainly, Aristotle holds [...] that we want our ends because we find them good',<sup>73</sup> and specify that the non-rational aspect of the soul, insofar as *phantasia* is non-rational, discerns their goodness in imagined pleasure. Hence they could hold that discerning good ends does not require the activity of the rational aspect of soul, provided that they could, however, also plausibly deal with *EN* 1.13 and 6.13—the textual basis for the opposite rationalist interpretation—as Moss thinks her interpretation can.

Moss points out that all the earlier anti-rationalist interpreters *assumed*, just as contemporary rationalist interpreters assume, that Aristotle's division of soul in *EN* 1.13 is between our cognitive (i.e. actively discerning) and non-cognitive (i.e. only passively perceiving) capacities.<sup>74</sup> But since Moss has argued that the non-rational aspect of soul includes a cognitive capability—*phantasia*—she thinks that this hitherto unquestioned assumption must be revised: perhaps the *only* relevant difference between the aspects of soul is that the former discerns with concepts, the latter without.<sup>75</sup> According to Moss' suggested revision, the *only* task of reason in

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<sup>72</sup> One may of course also think that there is naturalistic fallacy—an equation of the good with natural features that cannot be shown to be synonymous to it—in Aristotle's thinking in any case: even if he would not equate pleasure with the good, he would nevertheless equate *eudaimonia* with it. However, unlike pleasure ((a state resulting from satisfying a desire or being in the state of satisfaction (*EN* 7.12 1152b33-1153a7 and 7.14) accompanied by the heating of body (*DMA* 701b33-702a1)) *eudaimonia* evades a naturalistic definition: *eudaimonia* is acting well in which contemplation has a central role.

<sup>73</sup> Moss 2012, p. 158. I have replaced the word 'un-Humean' with square brackets, since in this paper I am not able to study the great question about the relation between Aristotle and Hume.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Moss 2012, pp. 223-4.

value cognition would be to label our non-rational discernments of ends with moral concepts (such as ‘virtuous’, ‘advantageous’ or ‘shameful’) which does not modify their content or causal efficacy, but only enables us to use them as starting-points in moral reasoning.<sup>76</sup> She presents the passage of EN 7.8 that we have already seen, to support her conclusion: ‘neither indeed in [mathematics] is the *logos* instructive of the starting-points nor in [the practical case], but virtue, either natural or habituated [is instructive] of the right belief about the starting-point.’<sup>77</sup> Moss thinks this passage tells that ‘our cognitions of the starting points of practical reasoning [i.e. of good ends] are rational, exercises of intellect—but their content derives from character, i.e. from the generalised *phantasia* that is produced through habituation.’<sup>78</sup> Once a person’s *phantasia* has perceived an action as pleasant, which, as Moss thinks, is to discern it as good, ‘intellect steps in’ as she puts it in her 2011 article, ‘assenting and thereby conceptualizing the appearance [...]. Now [the person] not only experiences an appearance of virtuous activity as the good, but also believes that it is so’.<sup>79</sup>

In the same article, Moss argues further that Aristotle’s claim regarding the necessity of acting with the involvement of right reason (*orthos logos*) for moral virtue in EN 6.13 does not have to imply, in light of her interpretation, that a virtuous person can articulate the right reason for his acting—to act well, because such acting is good—which would require *phronesis*. Rather, the claim can imply, more modestly, that even if a person can have moral virtue as a result of non-rational habituation only—as the anti-rationalist interpretation reads EN 2.4 to say—it is not *only said to be* proper virtue (*kyria arête*) unless he also consciously acts on the basis of the right reason. Moss explains her reading by means of the following analogue. Imagine two servants who act well. ‘The former acts on his own impulses; the latter takes the lead from his superior. And it would be reasonable enough, if somewhat odd to our ears, to say that only in the latter case is the servant truly (or strictly) an

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 227-228, quoting Tuozzo 1994 on p. 227: “the good and the desire ‘differ only in their mode of cognition: the one [good] is conceptualized, and so involves thought, while the other [the pleasant] is unconceptualized and so involves perception (or *phantasia aisthetike*)....”

<sup>77</sup> EN 7.8 1151a17-19, as quoted by Moss 2012 on p. 225.

<sup>78</sup> Moss 2012, p. 225.

<sup>79</sup> Moss 2011, p. 256.

excellent one’.<sup>80</sup> Proper (or strict) virtue might thus not be the same as moral virtue, as we have seen the rationalists read *EN* 6.13, but it could be moral virtue, for which the habituation of character and *phantasma* of good ends suffice, *plus* an ability to conceptualise the discernments of *phantasia* and articulate the right reason for action.

### 1.3 A Rationalist Reply to the Challenge

According to Moss’ anti-rationalist interpretation, the rational part of soul is not needed in discerning good ends: it is needed only for conceptualising them, deliberating about them, and articulating the reason for realising them. Once one has learned which actions are good, and has been habituated to enjoy acting well, one’s *phantasia*, which Moss interprets as an entirely non-rational faculty, suffices for discerning good ends. Rationalist interpreters have not, however, yet challenged her interpretation of *phantasia*, and her idea of applying this unorthodox interpretation to Aristotle’s theory of moral cognition. Let me attempt, however, to challenge it now.

I think that the most powerful argument against Moss interpretation would be that if it were endorsed, Aristotle would seem to be an incoherent thinker, unlike in the case of the rationalist interpretation. For Moss has not given us a compelling exegetic reason to think that the rationalist interpretation is incorrect. For example, the passage of *DA* 3.10—‘[m]any men follow their *phantasia* contrary to their knowledge, and in all other animals there is no thinking or calculation but only *phantasia*’<sup>81</sup>—could also be read as only confirming that *phantasia* often leads people to moral weakness, instead of (implicitly) claiming that *phantasia* and reason are ‘mutually exclusive’, as we have seen Moss take it to claim. After all, as we have seen, Aristotle also makes a distinction between rational and perceptual *phantasia* in *DA*. Although Moss suggests that rational *phantasia* could be only a name for using perceptual *phantasia* in deliberation, which requires its perceptions to be conceptualised, this reading is no more textually justified than the mainstream reading that assumes them to be separate aspects of *phantasia*: one that cognises without concepts, another with concepts.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. pp. 212–213.

<sup>81</sup> *DA* 3.10 433a10–11. Quotations from *DA* and *DMA* are from Moss 2011 and 2012.

The other key passages outside *EN* that we have seen Moss to quote as supporting her interpretation, one in *DA* 3.3—‘thinking and understanding seem to be just like having a perception of something, for in both cases the soul discerns (*krinein*)...’<sup>82</sup> and another in *DMA*, ‘both *phantasia* and perception (*aesthesis*) hold the same place [in moral discernment] as *nous*, for all are *kritika*’<sup>83</sup> are far from explicit in allowing that we can discern good ends without involving the rational part of our souls. The context of the former passage reveals that Aristotle might not even agree with the claim he presents in it: the passage is presented as *endoxa*, from which Aristotle starts his discussion of *phantasia*. Although the philosopher does not explicitly reject that *phantasia* could be *kritikon* in *DA*, he argues later in 3.3 that [*phantasia*] is not the same kind of thinking (*noesis*) as *krisis* [...] for *phantasia* is up to us [...] but in forming opinions we are not free, we cannot escape the alternative of falsehood or truth.’<sup>84</sup> At face value, this argument seems to imply that *phantasia* does not discern, because discernments have truth-values, whereas *phantasmata* as such do not have to have.<sup>85</sup> With regard to the passage of *DMA*, Aristotle’s purpose is not to show that our non-rational abilities could have the power of discernment, but classify all human motivations ‘either into thought (*nous*) or desire (*orexis*),’ as he announces right before the passage (in the line that Moss omits in her quotation). In the quoted passage, Aristotle only classifies *phantasia* and *aesthesis* among motivations that belong to the class of *nous* that is, are of the rational part of soul, on account of being discerning (*kritika*). In the end, the passage may thus even seem to support the rationalist interpretation: if *phantasia* and *aesthesis* are rational motivations, then, surely, discerning good ends with them involves the activity of the rational part.

In *EN*, we saw Moss to appeal to this passage of book 3, chapter 4: ‘a virtuous person discerns each thing [i.e. good end] rightly, and in each case the truth appears to (*phainetai*) him, for distinctive things [potential ends] are noble (*kala*) and pleasant

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<sup>82</sup> *DA* 3.3 427a19–22.

<sup>83</sup> *DMA* 700b20–21.

<sup>84</sup> *DA* 3.3 427b16–21.

<sup>85</sup> My counterargument may not seem to be decisive, for Aristotle’s argument could also be taken to imply that although *phantasia* can discern (e.g.) good ends, as *endoxa* suggests, it cannot discern whether these discernments are true or false, i.e. reflect the validity of its own discernments, which is the task of *nous*. However, I think this alternative is unlikely, since Aristotle’s words state that *phantasia* is not a discernment (*krisis*), not that it is a discernment in some qualified sense. Therefore it is safer to assume that *phantasia* needs the aid of reason to result in discernments, i.e. rational *phantasia* (see p. 12 above).

according to (*kata*) each character.’<sup>86</sup> This passage does not, however, have to establish that virtuous people discern good ends by imagining (*phantazein*) certain ends as pleasant, as Moss takes it to tell. Instead of establishing a causal connection from an end appearing as pleasant to a virtuous person to his discerning that end as good, Aristotle’s claim may only establish a correlation. He may mean that the better one’s character is, the more reliably one’s sensations indicate the goodness of a potential end, although only fully virtuous people discern good ends entirely rightly.

Let me now attempt to show why we should prefer these my alternative, rationalist readings to what Moss makes up from the above passages to back up her anti-rationalist interpretation. Aristotle’s motivation for dividing the soul into rational and non-rational aspects is the first reason. We have seen Moss argue that the division is not between our cognitive (discerning) and non-cognitive (passively perceiving) capacities, but only between conceptual and non-conceptual ones—non-rational *phantasia* does not need to use concepts, but can nevertheless discern ends as good. In this case, the division would not be, however, relevant to the question of which abilities one should develop to discern good ends, but only to the question of whether this discernment involves concepts or not. In *EN* 2.2, Aristotle seems, however, to be more interested in the former kind of question: ‘we study ethics not so that we may know what virtue is, but so that we may become good’.<sup>87</sup> In light of this practical aim, it seems more likely that he would differentiate the capacities of the soul on the basis of whether they can discern which ends are good, not only on whether they utilise concepts. For the answer to the former question would help a student of ethics in deciding whether to include some intellectual education to his moral training apart from the habituation of non-rational desires, but the answer to the latter question would not have such a practical purport. Since the rationalist interpretation assumes that the division of soul is based on the division of cognitive and non-cognitive capacities, we have an initial, albeit small, reason to prefer it to Moss’ interpretation.

A more compelling reason to interpret Aristotle as a rationalist about the cognition of value, however, is that (at least) Moss’ reading of *EN* 6.13 is clearly less plausible than its rationalist alternative. Her analogy of two servants is not convincing. In fact,

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<sup>86</sup> *EN* 3.4 1113a29–32.

<sup>87</sup> *EN* 2.2 1103b27–8 (B&C).

Aristotle seems to think its opposite by stating in the chapter ‘it is neither possible to be properly virtuous without *phronesis*, nor it is possible to have *phronesis* without virtue’.<sup>88</sup> Instead of thinking that only a servant who acts well from obedience to the ends given by his master (who, in Moss analogy, stands for *phronesis*) would be truly excellent—implying that proper virtue is already developed virtue *plus phronesis*—it seems he would rather opt that only the servant, who acts well on the basis of his own reasoning is at all excellent—i.e., that any virtue presupposes *phronesis*, and is thus proper virtue. For example, in *EN* 1.4, Aristotle approvingly quotes Hesiod’s *Works and Days*: ‘the one is altogether best (*ariston*), who himself thinks (*noein*) all things, but good in his turn too is he who obeys one who speaks well’.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, in *EN* 6.13, right after the quoted passage, the philosopher seems to attempt to answer to a question that he presents in the beginning of *EN* 6.12: does it make any difference ‘whether [people] have *phronesis* themselves or (only) obey others who have it?’<sup>90</sup> His explicit answer to this question (quoted on p. 6 above) is that only the people who have *phronesis* can act from the right reason (*orthos logos*), i.e., perform good actions for their own sakes, which is properly virtuous acting. Thus, it seems that according to Aristotle, if one acted well from taking the ends provided by her non-rational *phantasia* as given—assuming, for the sake of argument, that it can discern good ends—one would not yet be truly excellent, or, morally virtuous, which would require also *phronesis*. It is therefore (very) unlikely, *pace* Moss, that Aristotle would imply in *EN* 6.13 that one can be morally virtuous without yet having *phronesis*.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *EN* 6.13 1144b25–33.

<sup>89</sup> *EN* 1.4 1095b10–11, quoting Hesiod, *Works and Days* 293.

<sup>90</sup> *EN* 6.12 1143b30–32.

<sup>91</sup> Recently, also Moss seems to have noticed the weakness of her analogy. In Moss 2014a, she admits that a rationalist interpreter ‘has to hand a much more substantive explanation [than an anti-rationalist] of *phronesis*’ difference to and superiority from cleverness [*deinotes*]: *phronesis*, she can say, *is what gives one right end*’ (Moss 2014a, p. 230, cf. fn. 24 above for my alternative interpretation). Thus, she now says that ‘it is reason’s,’ i.e. not only *phantasia*’s, ‘job to grasp what one’s character has fixed a goal and also recognise it as a goal.’ (p. 223) ‘This means,’ according to her, that desire obeys reason in the way that “someone obeys another when she says ‘I want *F* things, but I do not know what kinds of things are really *F*, and so I do not know if I want *x*, *y* or *z*, therefore I will defer to the counsel of my wise parent, friend or teacher.” (p. 239) These modifications prevent Aristotle’s division of soul in *EN* 1.13 or his insistence for the necessity of *phronesis* for virtue in *EN* 6.13 from posing problems to Moss’ interpretation. Even her modified interpretation, according to which non-rational habituation determines whether one wants e.g. *F* things or something else (p. 233), is, however, vulnerable to the problem with Aristotle’s conception of moral responsibility that I introduce below.

The final and, I think, by far the most compelling reason, however, is that Moss' anti-rationalist interpretation about Aristotle's theory of value cognition seems to have a serious problem with his conception of moral responsibility. Moss does not, however, discuss this problem. Perhaps she tacitly assumes that since, according to Aristotle, an adult is responsible—subject to just praise or blame—for his actions if he performs them willingly (*hekousion*),<sup>92</sup> and since the voluntariness of an action does not require it's being (rationally) desired,<sup>93</sup> one could be responsible for one's actions even if one chose them non-rationally, by imagining them as pleasant. Such an assumption would, however, be mistaken. For Aristotle evidently thinks that mere voluntariness does not yet make an action morally assessable.<sup>94</sup> In *EN*, the philosopher also says that both small children and animals act voluntarily,<sup>95</sup> but are not responsible for their actions, unlike adults.<sup>96</sup> Hence humans must achieve something in their moral development that animals cannot achieve, which renders them responsible for their voluntary actions. The most obvious candidate for this achievement would be developing a capability to *choose* what to do, independently of one's non-rational *phantasia* or any non-rational desires—this is, rational choice, or, *prohairesis*. Although Aristotle does not mention *prohairesis* while discussing just praise and blame in *EN*, he acknowledges it is needed for moral responsibility in *EE*:

Since virtue and vice and the acts that spring from them are respectively praised or blamed -for we do not give praise or blame for what is due to necessity or change or nature, but only for what we ourselves are causes of [...] it is clear that virtue and vice have to do with matters where the man

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<sup>92</sup> Willingly performed, or, voluntary, actions are actions that elicit 'praise or blame', i.e., are subject to moral responsibility (*EN* 3.1 1109b34–5). In order to be voluntary, clarifies Aristotle, the action has to be up to us (*eph' hemin*) and not performed in ignorance (*EE* 2.9 1225b9). Some interpreters (e.g. Destre 2012) think that being up to us means that the agent should have had an opportunity to act otherwise; some others (e.g. Everson 1990) stress that for an action to be called the agent's own, it is not necessary that she could have acted otherwise. However, whatever one thinks about the correct interpretation of *eph' hemin*, and the applicability of 'could have acted otherwise' -condition to Aristotle, that does not affect my thesis of the necessity of *prohairesis* for moral responsibility.

<sup>93</sup> *EE* 2.7 1223b29–38: 'we do many things voluntarily without anger or desire [...] it remains then to consider whether acting from rational desire and voluntary acting are the same [...] but no one rationally desires what he thinks bad, but acts so [voluntarily] in the state of *akrasia* [...] it is therefore clear the voluntary then is not action from [even rational] desire [...].

<sup>94</sup> One might think that so-called mixed actions show this already: When a captain (see *EN* 3.1 1110a8–11) has to throw cargo away from his ship so as to save it from sinking does not justify blaming him of losing the cargo, despite he throws it away voluntarily. However, it justifies praising him of saving the ship. Therefore also he is responsible of what he did—apparently because his action was voluntary.

<sup>95</sup> *EN* 3.2 1111b8.

<sup>96</sup> Aristotle claims that a mark (*semeion*) of morally responsible agents is that their actions are subject to legal punishments (*EN* 3.1 1109b31–5), which is of course not the case with animals or children.

himself is the source and cause of his acts. We must then ascertain of what actions he is himself the source and cause. Now, we all admit that of acts that are voluntary and done from the choice [*prohairesis*] of each man he is the cause, but of involuntary acts he is not himself the cause; and all that he does from choice, he does voluntarily.<sup>97</sup>

Above passage establishes that *prohairesis* allows us to regard a person as the cause of his actions, and thus responsible of them. According to Aristotle, *prohairesis* is realised ‘when discerning with deliberation, we choose [with our reason] according to our rational desire’.<sup>98</sup> Thus, a choice of action made without antecedent deliberation, and the rational discernment of an end to be desired, could not be *prohairesis*. This being the case, it would be impossible for one to become responsible for his actions in the light of Moss’ anti-rationalist interpretation. Assuming that habituation to virtue is a non-rational process and, moreover, that our discernment of ends is a form of non-rational cognition, *phantasia*, which operates by associating the sensations of pleasure and pain with concepts, and somehow synthesising the mental pictures of the most desirable ends from these associations, we could not genuinely choose our ends and actions. It would thus be unexplainable why we consider most humans to be responsible for their actions, and justifiably so according to Aristotle. Since the rationalist interpretation gives us a way to credit the philosopher with a justification of our moral responsibility unlike (even) Moss’ anti-rationalist interpretation, we have a presumptive reason for taking Aristotle to think that discerning good ends involves the activity of the rational part of soul. When we consider this conclusion together with our earlier considerations against Moss’ interpretation, we have, I think, a presumptive case for interpreting Aristotle as a rationalist about cognising value.

### Conclusion

We have seen that if we did not need reason to discern good ends, but only *phantasia* that Moss interprets to be exclusively non-rational, we could not conclusively explain many things about Aristotle’s theory of the cognition of value.

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<sup>97</sup> *EE* 2.6 1223a9-19. Translated by Solomon (1995). ‘Excellence’ and ‘badness’ replaced with ‘virtue’ and ‘vice.’

<sup>98</sup> *EN* 3.3 1113a11–12. Few lines before this definition, in 3.3 1113a6, Aristotle says that *prohairesis* occurs ‘in the ruling part of soul’, i.e. in the rational part. I have indicated this in the square brackets.



For example: what is the reason for his division of human soul in *EN* 1.13? And if there is no reason related to moral improvement, what for we study ethics according to *EN* 2.2, why does he even divide the soul in *EN*? If he regarded any rational cognition of good ends unnecessary for moral virtue, why he considers proper virtue to involve *phronesis*—which has cognitive access to the correct conception of the end—not only obedience to it, as his view e.g. in *EN* 1.4, that the best is who himself thinks all things and does not only obey others, testify? He even explicitly justifies this view in *EN* 6.13: only people that have *phronesis* can act from *orthos logos*, perform good actions on account of their intrinsic goodness, which is what distinguishes virtue from merely acting well. The most important and difficult problem for Moss is, however, the question why Aristotle considers us responsible for our actions, if this responsibility, as the philosopher acknowledges in *EE*, presupposes the capacity of choice (*prohairesis*)? If the discernment of good ends would be non-rational, and depend therefore entirely upon non-rational habituation, as Moss thinks, we could not develop the capacity of choice and, hence, become responsible for our actions. Since the ancient rationalist line of interpretation, according to which we need to use the rational part of our souls in discerning good ends, can tackle with all these questions, it remains more plausible than even Moss' version of its anti-rationalist alternative.

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